

Assisted living Advisor

A resource for assisted living providers serving low income seniors

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HCBS AND AL WAIVER UPDATE

Pursuant to House File 617, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) is in the process of formulating a plan to petition the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to add assisted living as a waiver service under the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) elderly waiver. DHS is currently working with two different groups to develop a plan to submit for CMS approval.

A stakeholder group, comprised of representatives from state agencies, trade associations, and

providers, submitted a plan in 2004 that includes a three-tiered, acuity based system that mirrors the nursing home reimbursement system. The stakeholder group recommended assigning a percentage to each acuity level, based on the median Medicaid reimbursement for nursing homes. Figures ranged from a 40-50-60 percent payment rate to a 60-70-80 percent payment rate. Most all recommended reimbursement rates exceed the currently allowed \$1,052 maximum reimbursement under the HCBS elderly waiver.

Governor Vilsack recently tasked directors from state government agencies with a stake in the assisted living reimbursement issue to meet and formulate a response to the stakeholder proposal. This group is comprised of representatives from the Department of Elder Affairs, DHS, Iowa Finance Authority, and the Department of Inspections and Appeals. The agency directors will review the recommendations of the stakeholder group before DHS submits a request to CMS to add assisted living as a service under the HCBS elderly waiver.

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SCREENING FOR VA BENEFITS

At least one affordable AL provider was recently advised that the program was required to screen all applicants receiving services under the Medicaid program for VA eligibility. IFA procured a copy of the DIA "Hot Notice," ad-

vising that DIA staff would begin surveying to ensure that providers had identified, through an online system, tenants who are eligible for VA benefits.

Review of the DIA notice and Iowa Assisted Living Code (Chapter 231C) re-

vealed that the requirement to screen applicants for VA eligibility applies only to nursing homes, intermediate care facilities for the mentally retarded, and intermediate care facilities. DIA confirmed that assisted living providers are not required to screen for VA benefit eligibility.

Regulatory reminders

- Tenant assessments should include a cognitive screen, a functional assessment, and documentation of the tenant's health status.
- The AL program nurse must document compliance and efficacy of medications for tenants receiving program-administered medications at least every 90 days.

CARING FOR CLIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

Many affordable assisted living programs do not have a dementia unit. Yet many of the low- to moderate-income seniors seeking services may have some level of dementia. How can a program determine whether it is capable of caring for residents who are in the early stages of dementia?

Ann Martin, Adult Services Bureau Coordinator at the Department of Inspections and Appeals, recommends that programs carefully consider whether they have the capability to address the needs of clients in the early stages of dementia. Ann advises, “The appropriate tenants for a general population in assisted living are those who present with mild cognitive impairment, characterized by the earliest, clear-cut deficits of cognitive decline. These clients would score at a stage three on the Global Deterioration Scale.”

The Global Deterioration Scale is a tool that provides caregivers an overview of the stages of cognitive

function for those suffering from primary degenerative dementia, such as Alzheimer’s disease. It is broken down into seven different stages.

The Alzheimer’s Association advises that clients at stage three are most generally appropriate for the as-

“Appropriate screening and engaging activities contribute to an effective living environment for elders challenged by dementing illnesses.”

sisted living environment. However, many of these clients choose to stay in their private homes and access home health services. Often times families begin to consider assisted living when they believe it is no longer safe for the client to be home alone for any length of time.

Clients in the early stages of dementia can greatly benefit from the assisted living environment, where

engagement in activities that have meaning and purpose can elongate the time when it is still appropriate for them to live in assisted living.

Ann advises that providers that fail to deliver programs that meet the needs of tenants with dementia may find themselves struggling to care for residents with dementia. “Elopement and aggressive behavior can result when activity programming does not meet the needs of individual tenants,” she advises.

There are screening tools that attempt to pinpoint the stages of dementia. The Brief Cognitive Rating Scale and the Global Deterioration Scale, both developed by Dr. Barry Reisberg, can help providers determine the severity of dementia in a specific tenant. These tools are both available at www.geriatric-resources.com.

“Appropriate screening and engaging activities contribute to an effective living environment for elders challenged by dementing illnesses,” says Ann.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Many times it is difficult for seniors to connect with other tenants, even those who appear to be quite sociable. Tenants sometimes form small groups with others who have similar interests or personalities. They often miss the opportunity to get to know other tenants.

In order to encourage tenants to build new relationships, consider hosting a week long team competition. Pre-select the teams, mixing together tenants who do not normally socialize together. Choose a name and mascot for each team (i.e., tigers, cardinals, etc.) and purchase team t-shirts of different colors that residents can wear throughout the week.

Conduct activities that allow residents to earn points for their team. Some activities could present the opportunity to compete against another team. Card games where the teams are jumbled up, but the tenant brings their score back to the team for tallying are a good way to ensure a great deal of interaction between residents.

Some suggestions for activities:

- Board and card games
- Treasure hunts
- Talent contest
- Miniature golf course
- Trivia contest
- Name that tune contest
- Charades

If you have a kitchen in a common area, try providing each team with the same sack of groceries and a cookbook, and see which team can create the best meal or treat from the ingredients. Have staff judge the cooking contest to determine which team was most creative.

At the end of the competition, acknowledge the team with the most points but find a way to make all residents feel like winners. The team voted as “best team spirit” will be just as pleased with their award as the team that wins the points competition. And better yet, new relationships will develop from the opportunity to get to know a neighbor.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR TENANTS?

Do you know what kind of job every tenant in your AL program had when they were employed? Do you know if tenants lived on a farm or in the city? Do you know if any of your male tenants served in World War II? Do you know if any of your female tenants lost a spouse or other close family member in the war?

Good customer service is based on having an intimate knowledge of what kind of lives your tenants lived before they came to live with you

and what types of activities and relationships are still of great importance to them.

As an AL manager, you can't deliver stellar customer service unless you understand who the tenants are and what brings them pleasure, joy, and comfort. Likewise, you need to understand what makes them uncomfortable. Take for instance the 95-year old ballerina who consistently refused to take a shower. Staff spent a considerable amount of time working with her to make

her comfortable. Finally, a staff member simply asked, "Why are you so uncomfortable about your bath time?" The beautiful, dignified lady, who had danced for kings and queens, simply responded, "Nobody has ever seen me naked. Not even my husband. I always undressed in the dark."

Imagine what a difference you can make in the lives of your residents just by understanding a few simple aspects of their lives, loves, fears, and desires.

SPRINKLERS SHOULDN'T BE A MYSTERY



LIFE SAFETY TIPS FOR AL PROVIDERS

Provided by
Craig Swartzbaugh
Construction Analyst
Iowa Finance Authority

The owner of an assisted living facility is responsible for the inspection, testing, and maintenance of the sprinkler system. Iowa AL facilities have an NFPA 13 or 13R sprinkler system that is required to be in compliance with National Fire Protection standards and to be properly maintained at a level of performance and protection as originally designed. The testing, inspection, and maintenance requirements are located in NFPA 25, Standard for the Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems:

"All automatic sprinkler systems shall be continuously maintained in a reliable operating condition at all times, and such periodic inspection and tests shall be made as necessary to ensure proper maintenance. When an automatic sprinkler system is out of service for more than four hours within a 24-hour period, the building shall be evacuated, or an approved fire watch shall be provided for all portions left unprotected by the sprinkler system shutdown until the sprinkler system has been returned to service." (NFPA 2000 fire prevention handbook.)

In Iowa, the State Fire Marshal's (SFM) office requires that facility staff notify their office immediately for further instructions. The SFM may approve a fire watch system until sprinkler system repairs can be completed. The emergency number for the SFM is 515-281-5821.

Facility management and all staff should have emergency numbers readily available for the maintenance supervisor and sprinkler company who installed the system. Remember: These numbers should include the "after-hours" number(s), as well as the daytime number.

The local fire department should be notified immediately of sprinkler system downtime so they can respond accordingly. This number should be kept by all phones within the facility, along with other pertinent emergency numbers. The local fire department may request additional fire safety requirements until the sprinkler system is repaired.

Assisted living owners and managers need to hire a professional company to perform the required servicing and routine maintenance for the sprinkler system. Records must be kept on all equipment and service.

Editor
Jenny Knust
Affordable Assisted Living Coordinator
100 East Grand Avenue, Ste. 250
Des Moines, IA 50309

Phone: 515-242-4748
Fax: 515-242-4957
jenny.knust@iowa.gov



The Iowa Finance Authority is committed to providing opportunities for individuals and organizations to expand housing opportunities to low- and moderate-income families and individuals. Jenny Knust, Affordable Assisted Living Coordinator, serves as a technical advisor to programs seeking to serve low- to moderate-income seniors in the assisted living environment. The position is funded by a grant from the US Department of Agriculture, Rural Community Development Initiative. This publication is designed to serve as a resource for RCDI grant recipient organizations and others who are developing and/or managing affordable assisted living programs.

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"Affordable Assisted Living")

EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL

Building an effective staff training program

Iowa Assisted living rules, 321, Chapter 25, section 25.33(7): The program shall have training and staffing plans on file and shall maintain documentation of training received by program personnel.

Every assisted living manager understands the importance of providing a quality educational program for staff. There are many educational resources for conducting training sessions with employees. Some trade associations offer training resources to members free of charge or at a minimal cost.

While all programs offer training for employees, Chapter 25 specifically requires programs to develop training and staffing plans and to maintain documentation of training received by program personnel.

Getting started

In order to develop a training and staffing plan, it is important for managers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations. Programs that hire only certified staff may have very different training needs than programs that hire universal workers. Certified caregivers come with a knowledge base that is probably not present in an uncertified employee.

The staffing plan should identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and the training plan should address the organization's efforts to meet the educational needs of the employees it hires.

Documentation of training

There are several ways programs can document the content of and attendance at educational offerings.

Three-ringed binders work very well for storing copies of the materials presented at each inservice. If surveyors identify issues during the survey process, the manager will want to be able to produce the content of educational sessions provided to address that issue.

Provide a sign-in sheet at each educational session for filing with the contents of the module. One easy way to keep track of training provided to an individual is to keep individualized training tracking sheets. At each educational session, staff will sign the general sign-in sheet, as well as entering the name and date of the session on their individualized tracking sheet. This will prevent program staff from having to review every sign-in sheet to determine what educational sessions an employee has attended.